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‘Ironhorse Winds’ quintet brings classical music to battlefield

By Sgt. Kristin Kemplin
363rd MPAD

BAGHDAD, Iraq – The French horn opens “Carmen Ste. No. 1” with a short, entrancing solo and the curiosity of the audience at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad piques to the recognizable tune of the Broadway classic. Bassoonist Staff Sgt. Heather Secora seamlessly enters in with a low supporting melody to join Staff Sgt. Troy Hascall, on French horn, and Sgt. Mark Ward, on clarinet. Flutist Staff Sgt. Scott Magnuson and oboist Sgt. 1st Class Wade Petree rapidly flutter their entering notes to complete the ensemble. In a quick, sudden breath the ensemble finishes the introduction and launches into the heart of the piece. The flute flutters up and down the music scale as Secora’s bassoon insistently pumps out the lower beats, fast then slowing in time with the rest of the quintet until the song reaches its all-too-quick conclusion.

The ending notes drift into silence and the musicians lower their instruments, careful not to strike a chord that would shatter the peaceful quiet.

The pace of Carmen Ste. No. 1 is similar to the pace the quintet has set for itself: to work the music of five professional musicians into one group, weaving together the experience and talents of each, to play the music of some of the greatest composers in the last 300 years; and to leave the audience wanting more.

Polite applause accompanied the end of the piece from the Broadway hit Carmen and a few pictures of the group are taken by appreciative classical music fans.

Within minutes the ensemble resumes their lunch-hour performance at the Embassy April 29, mixing romantic chamber music with sultry operatic tunes.

The Ironhorse Winds ensemble, formed when the 4th Infantry Division Band gained the talents of Staff Sgt. Secora and Staff Sgt. Hascall, has been playing as a group since September. The group travels around the 4th Inf. Div.'s area of operations to bring the music of Mozart, Giuseppe Cambini and compositions from Broadway favorites to name a few, to classical music fans.

The highly-talented group possesses more than 100 years of experience cumulatively in music and each is proficient in playing at least two instruments.

"This is the most talented group I have ever worked with," said Sgt. 1st Class Wade Petree, platoon sergeant for the 4th Inf. Div. Band, and native of Roseville, Minn.

Petree, who has been playing music for more than three decades, is the leader of the quintet. But the music to be played is never dictated by one person alone, he said. It's a "collective effort" to pick out pieces, he said. The something-for-everyone group chooses pieces that are familiar to Soldiers, as well as lesser-known pieces classical music lovers will appreciate.

Secora said she feels classical music has a relaxing effect on listeners.

“I have seen people come in with the weight of the world on them, doctors and chaplains coming in after a tough day, and they appear refreshed after listening to us play.”

“Music is international. Mozart is the same in China as it is in Europe and America,” said the bassoonist, a native of Southwick, Mass.

“I think it surprises (the audience) to see an Army band playing classical music,” said Hascall, operations noncommissioned officer and native of Atlantic, Iowa.

This versatile ensemble continues to add complexity to pieces and the musicians hope to one day develop a signature piece, said Petree.

In the meantime, the group is making preparations for a formal recital in conjunction with musicians of the V Corps Band, tentatively set for July at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. The rare opportunity to display their professional-level ability in such a setting excites the ensemble. The winds have selected two feature pieces so far, one by Mozart and one by Strauss, regarded by many as two of the greatest composers in classical music’s history.

“The music we have chosen is very challenging,” said Petree.

For security reasons, not all band performances are posted. For information regarding upcoming performances you may contact Sgt. 1st Class Al Marroquin by phone at VOIP 242-2181, or by email at aulio.marroquin@mnd-b.army.mil



Quintet.

BAGHDAD – The Ironhorse Winds: (clockwise from left) Staff Sgt. Heather Secora on bassoon, Sgt. Mark Ward on clarinet, Staff Sgt. Scott Magnuson on flute, Sgt. 1st Class Wade Petree on oboe, and Staff Sgt. Troy Hascall on French horn. The quintet routinely performs classical pieces at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Kristin Kemplin, 363rd MPAD)



Magnuson & Petree.

BAGHDAD – Staff Sgt. Scott Magnuson, and Sgt. 1st Class Wade Petree perform a piece from Carmen at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in April.

Magnuson, a native of Astoria, Ore., also plays the piccolo and has recently begun to experiment with the accordion. Petree, of Roseville, Minn., has more than 30 years of experience in music and is equally skilled with the clarinet and oboe.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Kristin Kemplin, 363rd MPAD)



Secora.

BAGHDAD – Staff Sgt. Heather Secora guides the quintet through several pieces from the Broadway musical Carmen with her low, paced beats. Secora, a native of Southwick, Mass., began performing with the group in September and can play the French horn, oboe and clarinet in addition to her instrument of choice, the bassoon.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Kristin Kemplin, 363rd MPAD)



Ward.

BAGHDAD – Sgt. Mark Ward, a native of Lafayette, Calif., controls the harmonious sound of his clarinet with the light touch of his fingers at a performance at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in April.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Kristin Kemplin, 363rd MPAD)